Writing a Proposal

Resource(s): http://www.library.illinois.edu/learn/research/proposal.html

- A **proposal** is a formal plan or suggestion for change or request of support for research. Although there are many types of proposals, the following are a few key points you should always clearly answer.

Key Points to Include in a Proposal
  - What would you like to do?
  - How do you plan to do it?
  - How will your proposal and its projected outcome affect yourself and others?
  - What has already been done in this area?
  - Why should you be the one to do it (or) how will your skillset benefit this plan?
  - How long will it take?
  - If applicable, what are the costs related to your proposal?
  - If applicable, what support will you need and from whom?
  - How will you evaluate your results?

- Keep in mind that you should *never* assume that the person you are submitting the proposal to already has details about any of the information concerning your proposal. Therefore, you want to be intensely thorough in all your explanations. Word choices and specificity are important!

What is the structure of a proposal?
- The structure of your proposal heavily depends upon the assignment. Some professors provide a detailed outline and precise information that should construct the entire proposal.

  - Avoid glossing over the specifics of the assignment.

  - Closely review all of the elements within the assignment and meet those requirements so none of those elements is missing in your proposal.

  - Answer all of the questions so your proposal will be clear and complete.

  - Study the word choices of the assignment. For example, if the professor wants sources to come from journal articles and databases, you should use those sources. Your proposal may stand the risk of being rejected if incorrect sources are used, some questions are unanswered, and/or the proposal is incomplete.

  - Use the set of assignment instructions as an example for the basic outline for the proposal.

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- If you were not provided a set of instructions, the basic format is listed below. However, keep in mind the proposal is NOT the same as the detailed research paper that usually follows the proposal once the proposal is accepted.

- **Title Page:**
- **Abstract:**
  - Similar to other written works, the abstract will serve as a brief overview of all that you've written.

- **Introduction:**
  - The introduction—usually written as one brief paragraph—should include the problem and what is being proposed as though you are introducing the idea to a stranger. These two elements will most likely form the thesis statement for the proposal and the detailed research paper that follows.

- **Background:**
  - Discuss past and present issues and research as they relate to the problem.
  - Be sure to make clear what the research problem is and what has already been accomplished in this area.
  - Give evidence of your own confidence and potential contributions to the area.
  - Show why previous and present work needs to be continued.

- **Description of Proposal:**
  - This section is the heart of the proposal and is the primary concern of the reviewer(s)
  - The comprehensive explanation of the proposal should be addressed at a professional level; this will show confidence in your knowledge of the area and in your plan.
  - Remember, as you explain your proposal design:
    - Be *realistic* about what can be accomplished.
    - Be *explicit* about any assumptions or hypotheses your idea rests upon.
    - Be *clear* about the focus of the proposal.
    - Be *intensely detailed* in the proposed plan/schedule of your work.
    - Be *specific* about how you will evaluate your data.

- No matter what, always follow the format given to you by your professor. If you are supposed to focus more heavily on one aspect than another, do so. Or, if your assignment is only a partial proposal, adhere to your professor's requirements and stay within the correct format.